



TOWN of PORTOLA VALLEY

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August 23, 2021

Commissioner Ricardo Lara
California Department of Insurance
300 Capitol Mall, 17th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Director Gustavo Velasquez
California Department of Housing and Community Development
2020 West El Camino Real
Sacramento, CA 95833

Chief Thom Porter
CalFire
1416 9th Street PO Box 944246
Sacramento, CA 94244

Commissioner Lara, Director Velasquez, and Chief Porter,

Recently, the Portola Valley Town Council appointed a subcommittee for long-term engagement with HCD, CalFire, the State Insurance Commissioner, state legislators, and other relevant parties on the intersection of wildfire and housing issues. We are proud to serve as this subcommittee.

We appreciate the opportunity to engage with your three state agencies/departments on the challenges of communities like Portola Valley when faced with what can feel like conflicting mandates: adding badly-needed housing to our Town (of which this Council has been very supportive) while controlling the long-term dangers of wildfire, particularly while it is increasingly difficult for existing homeowners to retain fire insurance.

While we are optimistic that the upcoming Housing Element process will find ways to accommodate Portola Valley's regional housing needs allocation of 253 new housing units, we are very concerned that CalFire's new very high fire severity zone maps will be released during/shortly after the publication of our draft Housing Element and Safety Element. Should there be a major change to those maps, we would need to revise those plans, which may require significant time that may cause non-compliance issues with HCD.

Additionally, if insurance non-renewals continue, it may prove impossible for newly constructed homes to be insured, let alone existing properties.

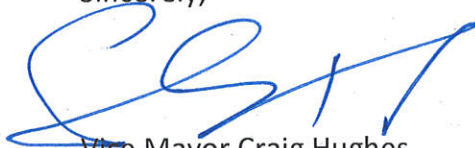
While we understand that the most recent RHNA process, at the regional planning level, took into account reduced allocations for communities with wildfire risk, it is unclear to us what level of coordination there has been between the three state parties that play a role in the nexus of these issues – HCD, CalFire, and the Department of Insurance.

Specifically, we request that HCD begin a dialogue with the State Insurance Commissioner's Office and CalFire to allow for a more comprehensive approach to the allocation of housing during the housing element process, as well as a role in working with state legislatures on inclusive contemplation of bills that may be contradictory.

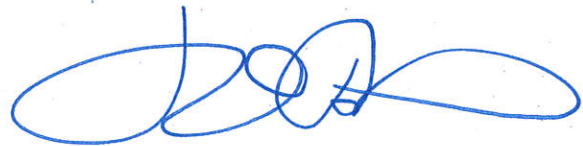
Portola Valley wishes to participate in these discussions as well, in order to share our observations of the challenges related to accommodating housing in areas that are impacted by fire/insurance issues. We would be happy to host (virtually or in person, as appropriate) such discussions, including any that may be useful with our residents.

The Town of Portola Valley stands by to assist in any way, and wishes to continue to productively and positively contribute to solutions for these challenges.

Sincerely,



Vice Mayor Craig Hughes
Subcommittee Member



Councilmember John Richards
Subcommittee Member

cc: Portola Valley Town Council
Portola Valley Planning Commission
Portola Valley Wildfire Preparedness and Emergency Preparedness Committees
Senator Josh Becker
Assemblyman Marc Berman
San Mateo County Supervisor Don Horsley